

A New Home

Bible Background • REVELATION 21:1–8

Printed Text • REVELATION 21:1–8 | Devotional Reading • REVELATION 15:1–8

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXAMINE the unique genre of “apocalypse” that characterizes Revelation in order to discern how to understand its message, CONTEMPLATE the creation of a new heaven and a new earth for the hope that this vision holds for the faithful, and EMBRACE the peace of God that begins in this life with Jesus and continues in God’s new creation.

In Focus

Randy’s phone rang, and he buried his head in the hard hospital pillow. He didn’t want to talk to anyone, even on his 50th birthday. He was too ashamed and too broken. He thought over the past few decades of his life. What had gone wrong?

His life had started out so promising — marrying his high school sweetheart, graduating from one of the country’s best universities, landing his dream job. But then, the addictions took control of his life. Drugs, gambling, adultery—he had done them all. He sighed deeply. Now he was alone. He was just an old, broken, bitter man. If only he had never taken that first hit. If only he had never bet that first dollar. If only he had never cheated on Shari...if only...if only...

He let the tears come, rolling down his cheeks. “God, what I wouldn’t give for a second chance,” he prayed. “I’ve made such a mess of my own life. If You’re really there, please help me. Help me!”

Now, Randy thinks of that day, a full decade ago, as the time when he really began to live. God heard his prayer and sent someone who shared the Gospel with him. God gave him the new beginning he had prayed for so desperately. God has restored Randy’s family, and he thanks God every day with the assurance that he will one day dwell with God for all eternity.

Many people would like to have a new beginning. What is it like to begin anew? How can Robert’s testimony demonstrate the hope of a new beginning to others?

Keep In Mind

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Revelation 21:4, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Dwell (Revelation 21:3) skenoo (Gk.) — To live in, especially in a tent

B. Fearful (v. 8) deilos (Gk.) — Timid, faithless

Say It Correctly

Zebedee. ZEH-beh-dee.

Gethsemane. Geth-SEH-mah-nee.

Omega. Oh-MAY-gah.

KJV

Revelation 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

NLT

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone.

2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.

4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

5 And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true."

6 And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life.

7 All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.

8 "But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

The People, Places, and Times

John. John, whose name in Hebrew means "Jehovah is gracious," was one of Jesus' 12 disciples, and he is believed to be the author of the Gospel of John, three epistles, and the book of Revelation. The son of Zebedee and brother of James, he was one of the three in Jesus' inner circle (along with James and Peter) who witnessed the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1), and he was present with Jesus

in the Garden of Gethsemane right before His arrest (Mark 14:32–33). John is recorded as the only disciple present at the Crucifixion and was instructed by Jesus to care for His mother, Mary (John 19:25–27). Of all 12 disciples, he was the only one not martyred (according to tradition). However, he was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos for his faith. It was there that he wrote the book of Revelation.

Bride. The imagery of the bride is used widely in the Bible as a description of the people of God. In the Old Testament, the prophets presented Israel as a bride who had committed repeated adulteries (Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 3). The prophets also proclaimed that God was faithful to His unfaithful bride and would restore her (Isaiah 61:10). In the book of Revelation, bride imagery is used for the Church and her relationship to Christ. The bride belongs to Christ, who is the Bridegroom (Matthew 9:15). In Revelation, the Church, as the bride of the Lamb, has prepared herself for marriage by performing righteous deeds (19:7–8). In the last days a great wedding is portrayed with the Church prepared for her Bridegroom (21:2, 9). The bride pictured here has not earned her status through righteous deeds. These acts were the Church's obedient response to God's saving grace. The garments of righteousness were given to her.

Background

The book of Revelation records four visions of John. The first vision (1:12–3:22) is of Jesus and His messages to the seven churches. The second vision (4:1–13:18) depicts Jesus Christ at the Throne of God, the opening of the seven seals, and the seven trumpet blasts. The third vision (14:1–16:21) describes Christ on Mount Zion. Our lesson today opens with the beginning of the fourth vision, in which we will learn about the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise in Christ—the Holy City, the New Jerusalem.

At-A-Glance

1. The Presentation (Revelation 21:1–2)
2. The Proclamation (vv. 3–4)
3. The Promises (vv. 5–8)

In Depth

1. The Presentation (Revelation 21:1–2) Genesis 1 gives us the account of the creation of the world. God divided the light from the darkness and the land from the seas. He created fish, birds, plants, animals and then He created humans. In Revelation 21, God reveals His creativity by first presenting the church, the Body of Christ, as the "bride." He then goes on to describe the place where the Bride will dwell—a new heaven and new earth. The old world will have passed away, with all of its problems, especially the chaotic sea. The new heaven and the new earth will be a fitting place for the Bride, the redeemed of the Lord, to dwell.

What kinds of images and feelings does "bride" bring to mind? Why are those helpful in understanding the relationship between Christ and the Church?

2. The Proclamation (vv. 3–4) In the Garden of Eden, God came down and physically fellowshiped with Adam and Eve. They walked with Him and conversed with Him on a regular basis. But sin destroyed this fellowship. Now in verse 3, after presenting the New Jerusalem, God joyfully proclaims

His intention to dwell with His people in the new city. In Scripture, the idea of God dwelling with His people and being their God is covenant language.

Perfect peace and joy result from God's eternal presence with His people. In God's perfect presence, there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, and no more suffering for all eternity. Verse 4 echoes Revelation 7:17; both verses promise that God Himself will tenderly care for His people, as a bridegroom cares for his bride. He will dry our tears and comfort us with the fact that the old has passed away. All is new. Never again will we experience the trials and tribulations of the old world.

Previously whenever a follower of God saw Him or was in His presence, it was a fearful thing (Exodus 20:18–19; Isaiah 6:5). What has changed that God dwelling with His Bride is now joyful?

3. The Promises (vv. 5–8) God, seated on His throne, directs John to write down His words. God says He is even now working on our behalf, transforming us into the image of His dear Son (2 Corinthians 3:18) and readying us for the day when we will be completely new. Our hope for that day is certain, for God always finishes what He has begun. In the same sense that Jesus spoke the words, "It is finished" (from John 19:30), God announces that His plan is accomplished. All has proceeded according to His will and for His glory.

God promises abundant, life-giving water to all who are thirsty. For Middle Eastern people living in the desert, water was often a scarce and valuable commodity. This promise of plenteous water therefore symbolizes life and prosperity.

Those who overcome, who fight the good fight of faith, will enter the Holy City and be richly rewarded as God's heirs, entitled to all of the benefits of a son or daughter. Those who reject God, however, will experience a "second death" (v. 8). The first death is physical death on earth. The second death is an eternal dying—a perpetual burning in the lake of fire. Instead of dwelling with God, these people will be eternally separated from Him.

In what ways can the water of life be read figuratively or literally? In what ways is the lake of fire figurative or literal?

Search the Scriptures

1. What physical aspect of the new heaven and earth will be different from today's world (Revelation 21:1)?
2. To what was the Holy City compared (v. 2)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What is the significance of the symbolism of New Jerusalem appearing as a bride?
2. Why did God want John to write down His words?

Liberating Lesson

What would it be like to be able to begin anew? People today are always longing for a fresh start—a new diet, a new job, a new house, a new school, a new marriage, etc. Some will take drastic measures to try to change their lives for the better. As Christians, we know that God offers the ultimate new beginning, which is salvation through Jesus Christ. When we are a new creation in Christ, we have the power to stop believing Satan's lies about ourselves and others, we have the power to think of others before ourselves, and we have the power to truly commune with God. We also understand that the joy

and peace we experience briefly in this world is just a taste of what we will experience in God's presence forever.

Application for Activation

Remember that God's promises are sure. You can count on Him to keep every promise. As you live your life of faithfulness before God, you can be assured that He will complete what He started in you. Others need to know this assurance as well. But people need to know they are sinners before they can recognize their thirst for what it is: a need for relationship with God. This week, pray for your unsaved loved ones and acquaintances. Pray that God will reveal to them their need for salvation. Pray that God will give you opportunities and wisdom to share the Good News of a true new beginning.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Revelation 21:1–8 1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

Revelation 21 and 22 present us with the Bible's longest and best portrait of what people commonly call "heaven," although what is actually shown is "a new heaven and a new earth" coming "down from God out of heaven" (21:1–2). Isaiah 65:17 also predicted "new heavens and a new earth."

Peter also wrote of a cosmic changeover or a total transformation (2 Peter 3:10–12). It describes a time when the current "heavens shall pass away" and be "dissolved" in fire, and "the earth...shall be burned up." This will make room for "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Peter 3:13). This imagery indicates the magnitude of this renewal. We see a different angle in Paul's letter to the Roman church: Creation "itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). This imagery indicates the continuity with the original creation even as it finally becomes what God always intended.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Two key images used here are that of the holy city and of the bride. Paul introduces the idea of a “Jerusalem which is above” (Galatians 4:26) as part of his web of metaphors to explain the Christian’s new freedom from the Law. Abraham’s wife Hagar, a slave who bears a son who is not the child of promise, is compared to the current Jerusalem on Mount Zion, where the Temple stands, representing the Mosaic Law and the sacrificial system that tried to make it so God and His creation could be together. Abraham’s wife Sarah, however, is a free woman who bears Isaac who inherits the covenant. She is likened to a heavenly Jerusalem, which is free and the mother of all those faithful to Jesus. In Hebrews, also, the writer contrasts Mount Sinai (of the Law) and the new Mount Zion (of Christ’s grace). This new Jerusalem is filled with joy instead of terror as Sinai was. In it dwell “the general assembly and church,” the justified saints, all the host of angels, and God and Jesus Himself (Hebrews 12:22–23).

Paul used imagery of the Church as Christ’s bride (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25–27), and John has already seen this terminology used previously in the vision (Revelation 19:7–8). Just as the groom wants to be with the bride, so Christ wants His church to be with Him. She has been made ready for Him. The word “adorned” (v. 2) in Greek is *kosmeo* (kos-MEH-o). This verb comes from the noun *kosmos* (KOS-mos), which is the Greek word for “the ordered world” and also means “ornament.” From this Greek word, we get our word “cosmetics.” Those who are believers have received new life, as Christ begins the process of beautifying each Christian as a member of His Bride (Ephesians 5:25–32). We have been charged to walk in newness of life through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to put aside our old ways of thinking, speaking, and living in order to fulfill God’s plan for us. We must live with the goal of showing others the way to the new city of God.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

In Old Testament times, God localized and centralized His presence with His people at the tabernacle (Leviticus 26:11–13; Ezekiel 37:27). In New Testament times, God came in the form of a man, and He “dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The word “dwell” occurs in both Revelation 7:15 and 21:3. In Greek, “dwell” is *skenoō* (skay-NO-oh). This is literally the word for “to pitch a tent,” reinforcing the connection between the Incarnation and the Tabernacle, which was a tent.

Here on the earth our sense of God’s presence is often dimmed, interrupted, or obscured. God dwells with us through the Holy Spirit, and we perceive Him by faith. But in the Holy City, we will live in the full measure of God’s physical presence. We will no longer accept His presence by faith alone. We will truly be with Him! What a glorious thought! When we are struggling through life here on earth, we can rejoice in the hope that one day we will live with our loving Creator, never to be parted from Him again.

Verse 3 restates Ezekiel 37:27, where God promises to one day dwell with His people in the fullest sense of the word. While on earth, we enjoy some of the blessings of being children of God: salvation, peace, joy, wisdom, and others. But when the New Jerusalem arrives, we will fully be His people and He will be our God, and we will dwell together. This reciprocal cadence is full of covenantal meaning. The sense here is of a prospective bride and groom who have been longing to consummate their marriage, to belong exclusively to one another, to have the right and the opportunity to live in each other’s presence forever. God is exulting over His plan that has finally brought His redeemed, His beloved, to His side, never to be parted from her again.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

God speaks directly at the beginning (1:8) and at the end (21:5) of the book of Revelation. Each of those who receives Christ in this life is already “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17), but we live in a sinful world (Romans 8:19–22) until the time that it will become new. All the sad and terrible things of this present world will be no more in heaven. They are the result of sin, which has been cleared away.

“He that sat upon the throne” is the Father God, described in iconic detail in an earlier vision (Revelation 4:1–6). God calls out, “I make all things new” (v. 5). He means it! And He is doing it now! The present tense of the verb “make” assures us that God is even now creating His new world. This wording is also reminiscent of a prophecy from Isaiah. There, God says, “Behold, I will do a new thing” (Isaiah 43:19), which is providing abundantly for His people, even though they have not been faithful to Him. Isaiah shares how God will institute a new way of interacting with His people, by blessing His people again and using even people like Cyrus to be His instruments, simply so that they will know that Yahweh is the only God. In this section of Isaiah’s prophecy, God also calls Himself “the first” and “the last” (Isaiah 44:6), which John will echo in his record of the following verse.

6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

God began everything by His will, and He will bring His plan to fruition. Just as Jesus said “It is finished” when His work which provided our salvation was complete (John 19:30), so also God will announce “It is done” at the end of human history (Revelation 21:6). Here, Christ is called the “Alpha and Omega.” Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The author explains this first phrase by adding that Jesus is “the beginning and the end.” Our sovereign God, the Alpha and the Omega, is the beginning and end of all things (Revelation 21:6).

The One who once offered a woman at a well “living water” (John 4:10) and said that “living water” could spring up inside of His people (John 7:37–38; cf. Zechariah 14:8) promises to give unto those who thirst of “the fountain of the water of life freely.” This coming age, when we will see God’s promises once and for all is portrayed in Scripture as flowing with abundant water (Isaiah 35:1–2; Ezekiel 47:1–12). Again, this promise echoes Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the return from exile (Isaiah 44:3; 55:1). By these allusions, John hopes to communicate that God’s people can think of the present world as captivity, and His coming as a return to our true home, where He will bless us abundantly.

Many people today do not lack physical water with which to quench their thirst, but they do lack what they need to quench their spiritual thirst. God created every human being to have a desire for the Creator. As believers, we are compelled to hold out the promise of living water to unbelievers, as Jesus did with the woman at the well (John 4:10). But even though we serve and love God here on earth, our thirst to know Him and to dwell in His presence is never fully quenched. Only when we reach that New City will our thirst for God be replaced with His eternal presence.

7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

In Greek, the word for “overcometh” is *nikao* (nik-AH-o), which can mean “to be victorious.” John often refers to those who “overcome” in Revelation, but does not directly say what it is they are

overcoming. He uses the word often in his epistles, and there, we see the overcomer is the Christian who conquers the evil one (1 John 2:13–14), and the whole world (1 John 5:4–5). John says our faith is the victory we gain over the world, and our faith is that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:4–5). A Christian is intended to be a world-conqueror, to hold fast to the belief that faith in Christ conquers temptations and persecutions.

Not only does God “make all things new” (21:5), but the Christian overcomer “shall inherit all things” (21:7). Indeed John’s first audience had perhaps already heard Paul announce in a letter to the Corinthian Christians that “all things are yours” (1 Corinthians 3:21). We will belong to God as His children for all eternity (Revelation 21:7). We are His heirs.

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

This last, sobering verse tells us that not all will be overcomers. Not all are true followers of Jesus; those who are not will face eternal judgment. Unbelievers are found in many places, even in the church. These are those who have not put their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Verses like this one compel us to tell others how to be saved. Hell is real. If we truly care about others, if we truly believe the truth of God’s Word, we must share the Gospel, even with the dire warnings.

The Greek for “fearful” is *deilos* (dee-LOS), which means “timid” or “cowardly,” but also implies faithless. If we consider the context of persecution under Rome, it helps us see that John was thinking of those who were too afraid to stand for Christ. During the time of trial, they were ashamed to say whose they were and whom they served. This word is not talking about the feeling of fear. Many exhibit true courage when they persevere in doing right even when they are actually afraid. What is condemned is letting fear keep us from standing up for our Lord.

The “abominable” are those who have allowed themselves to be saturated with the sinfulness of this world. Decadent ways of living were common in the days of the Roman Empire in which John lived, and who can deny the decadence of our world today? It’s so easy to be polluted by the things that flash across our screens, by the celebrated lives of rap stars, by news, gossip, and entertainment offered night and day by mass media, and so on. We must make a concerted effort to keep our thoughts, our values, our words, and our actions clean before God.

Then we come to “murderers.” John may have been thinking of those who persecuted Christians unto their deaths, but before we clear ourselves, we should remember that Jesus said, “Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (from Matthew 5:22). We may congratulate ourselves because we never use the word “murderer” to describe ourselves, but think of the times we may have muttered, “You idiot!” under our breaths to the driver who just cut us off in traffic. Isn’t this just the same?

“Whoremongers” are fornicators, those who have sexual relations outside of marriage. In our culture, it is common for unmarried couples to live together, but it is definitely against God’s Word. The next to be thrown into the lake of fire are the sorcerers and idolaters. This describes the worship of anything other than the one true God, and most often some aspect of God’s creation, from other human beings to superstitions to various material objects. Although we may not be in a context with idol worship as in Bible days, making material goods come before God is common. This is a case in which we need to examine our hearts to see where our priorities are.

The last in the list are the “liars.” Included in this title are those who are insincere, those who lie by their silence, or those who practice any other kind of untruth. Those who claim to follow Christ but actually do not would also be included.

As we examine this list and ourselves, chances are that most of us know that we are guilty of some of these sins. If so, we need to repent and ask for God’s forgiveness as well as for God’s power through the Holy Spirit to make a more thorough progress in the path of sanctification. The point of this text is not that we earn salvation by works, but it does point out our responsibility for obedience and perseverance in the Christian life. God’s Word gives us assurance that Christ’s work saves us, but we are always commanded to live as those who are actively following Christ. If we do so, we can live in confident assurance that we will not be cast into the lake of fire at the last judgment.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Lord, Our Dwelling Place
(Psalm 90:1–12)

TUESDAY

To Love God Is to Know God
(1 John 2:12–17)

WEDNESDAY

Faith Is the Victory
(1 John 5:1–5)

THURSDAY

God Will Do a New Thing
(Isaiah 43:14–21)

FRIDAY

Come, You Who Thirst
(Isaiah 55:1–5)

SATURDAY

More Than Conquerors
(Romans 8:31–39)

SUNDAY

God Will Dwell with God's People
(Revelation 21:1–8)